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THE NUER: AGE-SETS.

By E. E. Evans-Pritchard.

561 X[1]. Introductory note. Rôle of departmental experts in organisation of age-sets. The operation. Period of licence. Nomenclature and organisation of age-sets.

XI. Age-sets not regiments. Change in social status. Age-sets and kinship ties. Regulation of marriage. Influence of age-sets on leadership.

IN my earlier paper on the Nuer tribe and clan their age-set system was mentioned shortly as providing social stratification on a basis of age, and was hence one of the institutions relating to political authority and leadership. In the present paper age-sets are dealt with in more detail and their ritual of initiation, their structure and machinery, their ideology, and their social functions are described. A great part of the information given in this paper was collected from the lips of informants since I had no opportunity of witnessing initiation ceremonies, but on the other hand close contact with Nuer in their cattle camps enabled me to observe the less spectacular but perhaps more important relations of the age-set system in its daily commonplace action in social life. We are fortunate in possessing other accounts of Nuer age-sets, though I have no doubt that our combined accounts give a very incomplete picture of the institution.[2] The subject is not only of interest for those who come into contact with the Nuer but is of great importance for a general study of the age-set system in East Africa which still awaits comparative treatment.

A few words may be said here about the difference between "Age-grade" and "Age-set," a distinction in which I follow Prof. Radcliffe-Brown. An age-set is "a recognised and sometimes organised group consisting of persons (often male persons only) who are of the same age. .....In Africa, at any rate in East and South Africa, an age-set is normally formed of all those males who are initiated at one time..... Once a person enters a given age-set, whether at birth or by initiation, he remains a member for the remainder of his life." An age-grade is a term which "should be kept for recognised divisions of the life of an

[1] Numbered in continuation of my previous paper on "The Nuer: Tribe and Clan," *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vols. XVI-XVIII. The diagrams in this paper are also numbered in continuation of the diagrams in my previous paper.

[2] See bibliography in my earlier paper.

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individual as he passes from infancy to old-age. Thus each person passes successively into one grade after another, and, if he live long enough, through the whole series—infant, boy, youth, young married man, elder, or whatever it may be..... In East Africa, where the age-organisation is highly elaborated, each age-set normally passes from one grade to another as a whole."[1]

In this paper we are dealing mainly with the change of status brought about by initiation from Boyhood to Manhood. Initiation involves, however, not only a change from one social grade to another but also entrance into a set in which the individual remains for the rest of his life. The members of each set have a common name, like status, and like patterns of behaviour towards one another and towards members of senior and junior age-sets.

Among the Nilotes of the Sudan the age-set system appears to be most important among the Nuer on account of both the severity of its initiation and the social significance of the privileges associated with it. Among the Shilluk age-sets do not seem to occupy an important place in social organisation and the institution has an appearance of decay. The Seligmans record that at the time of their visit "it was of little importance and was probably dying out."[2] Among the Dinka it gives the impression of being of more importance than among the Shilluk and of less importance than among the Nuer, and the same may be said of the age-sets of the Nilo-Hamitic Bari discovered by Mr. Whitehead.[3]

The chief officer in respect to initiation into age-sets is the *wut ok* and this is in keeping with the fact that initiation largely concerns a boy's contact with the cattle. Before initiation he milks the cows and looks after the small calves and sheep and goats. After initiation he is strictly [illegible] milking the cows and he acts as herdsman to the adult cattle. During the period of initiation it is taboo for him to have any contact with the cattle and his first action on its conclusion is to re-establish this contact. After initiation also he receives a bullock or two from his father, and becomes legitimate owner of a bullock name and is permitted to dance and sing behind the bullocks.

[1] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. *Man*, 13, 1929.

[2] C. G. and B. Z. Seligmann. "The Pagan Tribes of the Southern Sudan," pp. 70-3.

[3] *Id.* pp. 170-6 and 263-6. Cf. the lengthy account of age-sets among the Nilotic Lango of Uganda by J. H. Driberg.

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From the point of view of initiation Nuer life is divided into two periods, the initiatory period and the period when no initiation may take place. These alternating periods are known as that when the knife is brought out, *ngom ham rar*, at the commencement of the period of initiation, and that when the knife is hung up, *ba ngom ngaj*, at the conclusion of the period. At the commencement of an initiation period the cattle-expert kills a bullock, a big dance is held, and he makes a speech opening a new period of initiation. It seems that in each tribe there is one cattle expert whose authority is recognised in matters concerning the age-set cycle. 881

In Gaajak country there was a serious dispute between two cattle-experts about commencing a new age-set. The privilege of giving orders for initiation had previously been in the hands of the lineage of Ngweny Riek. Owing to the fact that there was no son old enough to perform the duty it was carried out by the lineage of Jop Gai. Afterwards these two lineages appear to have taken over the duty in turn; the lineage of Riek gave orders for the *Thut* age-set to be initiated, the lineage of Gai gave orders for the *Boiloc* age-set to be initiated and so on. When it came to the *Rialmac* age-set it was Ngweny's turn to order initiation to commence but Jop refused to allow him to officiate. In revenge Ngweny made indentations into the ceremonial knife to render it useless and uttered a curse, saying that if the knife was his right then pus would come out of the ears of Jop, whereas if the knife belonged to Jop then pus would come out of his own ears. Another informant said that the dispute was occasioned by the question whether the knife should be brought out or hung up, *i.e.*, whether the period of initiation should be opened or closed and that Ngweny said," Let the knife now be hung up and not *be taken down again till one of us has died. When one of us has died* let the other order initiation to commence." Jop died and his rival initiated the *Rialmac* age-set. This same informant said that the knife will in future remain in the hands of the lineage of Ngweny since, as a result of Jop's death from the curse, his lineage would not again shoulder the responsibility. 881 578 791

It is the cattle-expert who gives a name to each age-set, *e.g.*, *Dangwaga*, *Makor*, *Lilkpac*, etc., at the end of a period of initiation and no one may then be initiated until he has opened a new period. It is believed that if a boy were to be initiated after the cattle-expert had given orders for 881

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881 the period to be closed his head would swell and he would die. It is possible however, if a boy is much older than the age at which Nuer generally have incisions made on their foreheads and if his family greatly desire him to be initiated, for the ceremony to take place in a neighbouring tribe where the period of initiation is still open, since not every tribe has its open and closed periods at the same time and there is often overlapping in this respect between different tribes. Thus I was told that Lou boys who insisted upon being cut at a time when the Lou were in a closed period might cross over into the adjoining Ngok Dinka country and be initiated there if it were still in an open period.

881 791 When the *wut ok* wishes to close an initiation period he takes a bullock and rubs ashes on its back and makes a speech formally closing the age-set and starting a closed period in which no boys in the tribe may be initiated. The tip of his ceremonial knife is then placed in the fire and afterwards stowed away in a pot. The bullock, after its legs have been cut off, is divided longitudinally into halves. I believe that one half is taken by members of the set which has just been closed and the other half by the set immediately senior to them. They then eat the flesh together. However, I am not sure about this point.

Though I have spoken throughout of the *wut ok* or cattle-expert as the authority who decides upon opening and closing age-sets we are not all agreed upon this point. My own information is derived from two or three informants but it is supported by statements of Stigand and Cranstans.[1] Jackson, on the other hand, says that as a rule the oldest surviving member of the senior existing age-set gives the order for the ceremony to be held and that it is he who initiates the first boy who should be his own son or a near relative. He adds that this man must be a leopard-skin chief and that after he has initiated the first boy the cattle-experts in each division of the Nuer are responsible for sectional arrangements.[2] Mr. Coriat also writes: "The classes are not regulated by a cattle-expert: the *wut ok* or Man of the Cattle is responsible only for the initiation ceremony itself. Age classes are now regulated and named by certain 'kwar mon,' Land Chiefs, with traditional powers."[3]

[1] Major C. H. Stigand, "Warrior Classes of the Nuers," *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. I, 1918, p. 116. Peter Cranstans, "Die Gar Zeremonie bei den Nuer," *Africa*, Vol. V, 1932, p. 68.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 145.

[3] Privately circulated memorandum.

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Boys are usually initiated between the ages of 14 and 16 but sometimes they are younger than 14 and sometimes they are older than 16. Sometimes a boy will just miss being initiated during an initiation period and he will then have to wait till the next age-set opens, by which time he may be somewhat older than is usual at initiation. On the other hand in order to avoid this happening a boy will sometimes be initiated at an unduly young age. Consequently one often sees tall youths without the marks of manhood on their foreheads and at the same time quite small boys with these marks. Another factor determining the age at which a boy will be initiated is the wealth of his family since they are not always able to supply their son and his comrades with corn and milk during their convalescence. If a family is as poor as this their son will either have to wait till the following year when his family will be better off or he will rely on the generosity of his relatives. His relations will generally assist him in the circumstances and it is frequently his maternal uncle who undertakes the expenses of initiation on behalf of his sister's son. Also a boy will not hesitate to appeal to his father's brothers for support and they would certainly not refuse him their assistance. Nothing is more humiliating for a boy than to see his playmates " become men " while he remains a " boy " compelled to work side by side with the womenfolk of his household and cattle-camp.

When his father has agreed to his initiation the boy goes to a member of his father's age-set and this man will pluck out a tuft of the boy's hair from the centre of his head (*nhiaw dār*) and will spit on it and afterwards rub the boy's face and head with it (*he yiwe puinde*). It appears that it is necessary for the father's age-set to give their blessing to his son through their representative. Also the boy's own father will rub his son's head with ashes, and both of these men will address the boy saying : " May there not be the slightest difficulty in the initiation."

Several boys are usually initiated at the same time, being either members or relatives of the same village. It is thought a bad thing for a boy to be initiated by himself as he will be lonely and will ail if he is cut off from his playmates and fellow-members of his age-set. He will pine for them (*he riede tiei*). In the part of Nuer country which I know arrangements are made for about four to a dozen boys to come together and be initiated at the same time and to spend their convalescence together. It does not matter when they are initiated so long as it is during an open

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881 period (which lasts several years) and at the right time of the year. The right time is in the *jiow* (our winter) when there is plenty of food after the harvest and the north wind, which cicatrizes the wounds, is blowing. But a boy may be initiated also in what corresponds to our springtime. I have no knowledge of initiation being restricted to a few days during which hundreds of boys are initiated, as Jackson gives one to suppose: "Some two hundred boys can be initiated in a day, each boy having the operation begun and completed on the same day. The doctors move from village to village where the boys are collected."[1]

304 881 The boy himself makes arrangements with the operator to cut his marks of manhood. There are a large number of these operators and there seems no reason why anyone should not practise if he has the necessary skill. The boy takes a fishing spear to the operator and presents it to him. With this is dug the hole into which the blood will flow and it afterwards becomes the property of the operator.

The operation takes place in the early morning before the sun is high, and the head is prepared on the previous day. It is closely shaved at midday since it is not considered well to shave the head in the morning. Just before the cutting the forehead is well washed with water and is rubbed with pancreas (*bŏl*) (*ba nhiemde cuik ka bŏl*) and finally with dust (*tap*). A hole (*koakriem*) is dug to receive the blood and in this the head rests on a grass circle (*thar*). After the operation is completed this hole is filled in with earth as it is thought a bad thing for the blood to remain exposed lest a dog or other animal might eat it. The cutting takes place in front of a hut or byre, and I was told that it would be highly improper for it to take place outside the homestead, for the boys' blood should be spilt in the homestead itself. Mothers and fathers and relatives and friends, even girl friends, watch the boys undergoing their ordeal. Tradition lays it down that a boy must show no signs of fear before or during the operation but often the ordeal is so terrible that their nerves give way. It is said that some boys will defecate with fear and pain, and some have been known to struggle and even to run away, though when this happens they are held down with force and their relatives are occasioned great shame. It is common for boys to faint during the operation and then their heads are slightly raised and milk is poured down their throats to revive them. Nevertheless as a rule boys display admirable

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 143.

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courage and betray neither fear nor pain, fortitude assisted by the presence of relatives whom they do not wish to disgrace and girls whose favours they hope to win. 881 304

The first cut is the most painful, probably because it severs the supra-orbital nerves. It is known as the *wec dokl* (the wiping out of boyhood) and runs just above the eyebrows right across the temples. The second cut is made just above the first and is called *guec mun duiel* because before initiation if a boy were hungry he would go to the entrance of his mother's hut and ask for food, whereas after initiation, when he has become a man, he will not plead for food but will sit quietly and bear the pangs of hunger. Altogether six cuts are made from the centre of the forehead to level with the right ear and the operator then completes them by commencing from the incisions at the centre of the forehead and cutting to level with the left ear. There are thus six parallel cuts running right across the temple from ear to ear.

The best description of the operation is given by Miss Huffman who has witnessed it and whose account I give here rather than my own which is based on oral accounts. [114] "A hole from four to six inches in diameter and about six or eight inches deep is dug for each boy. The earth which is taken out of the hole is pulverized and spread around the hole in order that it may absorb the blood. Women and girls attired in their dance skirts rush in, singing and dancing. One boy is called. He comes out, stark naked, not even wearing a bead. He lies down on his back with his head in the hole. He folds his arms over his chest and then he is ready. The man, kneeling beside him, begins to cut. He starts at the centre of the forehead and extends the cut to or even past the ear. The first cut is made just above the eyes, then the remaining cuts are made parallel to it until they are six in number. Then the man goes over to the left side and, kneeling there, repeats the same process. Then he returns to the right side and makes sure that all the cuts are deep and continuous at the centre of the forehead and that they are six in number..... As one is finished another boy is called until all lie there, still and bleeding. Usually everything is very quiet when the actual cutting is going on, the only sound heard being the grating of the knife on the bone. The boy lies there until the bleeding has stopped, then he is helped into the house. He crawls into the house on his hands and feet, but with his back next to the ground and tries to hold his head and body in a horizontal position....."[1]

[1] Ray Huffman, "Nuer Customs and Folk-lore," 1932, pp. 30-31.

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As soon as the cutting is finished the boys go and sit in front of the hut before which the operation has taken place. If they are able to do so they walk unaided with their heads held back from the shoulder. Otherwise they are assisted. Seated with their backs to the hut and with their heads held back they wave away flies from their lacerated foreheads. Meanwhile their mothers and the other women present utter ceremonial cries of joy as they dance in front of them (*be yi wa kuk*).

The lines cut are six in number but occasionally one meets men with seven cuts. Father Crazzolara says that this is due to the fact that the operator "in his artistic elation, forgets to count, and adds one or two lines beyond the number demanded by the fashion that prevails at the time."[1] This does not seem to me a very likely explanation. In Lou country I was invariable told that when two brothers were initiated at the same time the youngest received seven cuts, a statement borne out by the several cases I was able to investigate. A youth from Lek country on the Bahr-el-Ghazal who had seven cuts on his forehead told me that it was the custom in his tribe for the eldest son in a family to receive an extra cut but I was unable to check his statement from other informants. Miss Huffman writes that sometimes the operator "happens to be a very dear friend of the boy and may honour him by cutting seven cuts instead of the customary six."[2]

I do not think that there is any need to emphasise the severity of the ordeal, which may readily be understood from Father Crazzolara's statement that the cuts are distinctly visible on the skulls of dead Nuer. It is surprising therefore that it does not often result in death. Yet I have never heard of a boy dying during or after the operation though I made enquiries on the point, and the staff of the American Mission at Nasser told me that in their long experience of the country they had never heard of a fatal operation. Father Crazzolara on the other hand states that death is not infrequent.[3]

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On the day on which a boy is initiated from four to ten pots of beer

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 32. "Es soll vorkommen, dass der Gerontokrat manchmal in Eifer für seine Kunst, den Zählen vergisst, und eine oder zwei Linien mehr ritzt als das Gesetz verlangt. Darumgen wird vielfach ein Dutzeiner aufgestellt, der darauf zu achten hat, dass der Patient nicht mehr als nötig gepeitscht werde."

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

[3] "Die ersten 24 bis 28 Stunden sind die ernstesten, wegen der Gefahr des Verblutens. Es ist keine Seltenheit, dass ein alter Mann, der nachts oder in aller Frühe nachsehen kommt, einen der Knaben entblutet, ja in der Todesstarre antrifft." *Id.*, p. 32.

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are brewed and a bullock or sheep is killed. It seems that they do not always kill an animal but they must do so when it is an eldest son who is being initiated or a boy whose eldest brother has died. Members of the father's age-set eat the meat at night and they alone. During the night they sing songs amid the cattle. On the following day, in the afternoon, they drink beer and leap about behind the bullocks and there is a lot of horseplay. The womenfolk seize the penises of members of their husbands' age-set, the father of an initiated boy especially being subject to this treatment. They tie cord to the penises of the men and pull them while the men retaliate by tugging at the skin aprons of the wives of their age-mates. A man of the age-set of the father of an initiate will lift up the apron of his wife (the boy's mother) and will utter a ceremonial cry into her vagina. This man is generally the woman's *ocoenda*, that is to say a paternal cousin of her husband. Only members of the father's age-set and their wives will partake in this horseplay in the homestead of the father of the initiate. Thus if the boy is the son of a *maker* all members of the *maker* age-set will take part in the festivities, together with their wives, while members of the other age-sets, *e.g.*, the *Dangwaga*, will have their own fun in a neighbouring homestead with their wives. Younger people will not go near these festivities of their elders because they might see the genitals of their mothers and aunts. All those who have married daughters of the men who are sporting themselves will also give the festivities a wide berth lest they should see the nakedness of their mothers-in-law. This dance is called *bul ruathni* or *bul ruath dhoi*. They say that they make this horseplay because they are glad that their child has become a man.

After the cutting, which is called *gar*, the boys are shut up in a hut. This is not built for the purpose but is temporarily vacated by the women of the family in whose homestead the operation has taken place.

Between the cutting and the ceremonial exit from the period of convalescence the boys are known as *dit*. The boys suffer excruciating pain during the first two days or so after the operation and nothing can be done to relieve their agony. These first few days are recognised as being a time of great danger for the boys since the wounds may break open again and great loss of blood ensue. Youths and girls are prohibited from visiting the boys during this period since they are likely to be sexually unclean. Especially are pregnant women kept away from the vicinity

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881 784 and only those women who are nursing babies or who have reached the menopause are allowed near their hut. One or two men, often a youth who was initiated the year before, and who abstain from sexual relations for the time, will keep guard over the boys to prevent their heads from falling sideways, so that the grass circle which they use as a pillow sticks to their temples and in the effort to get it loose the wounds are re-opened. They must sleep on their backs with the backs of their heads on the grass pillows. An old woman may also sleep in the hut and assist in looking [757] after the boys. Should the wounds break open and bleeding be renewed the place is cauterised with a *rip* which has been heated in the fire.

Until they are taken to the river and cleansed at the end of their seclusion the boys must strictly avoid any contact with the cattle. This is a ritual prohibition, a *biit*, which involves a curse if it is infringed. Not only are they prohibited from going among the cattle but they must even avoid treading on cattle dung. It is said that if a cow approaches them the boys must immediately run away into the shelter of their hut. It is believed that a breach of this prohibition would prevent the formation of regular scars (*piar*) on the forehead so that all the marks of initiation, the pride of manhood, would be obliterated with the exception of the *mor dokl*, the cut just above the eyebrows. In this connection Miss Huffman records of an initiate that, " When one asks him if his wounds are healed he will always say ' not yet,' but one may find out if they are really healed by asking him if he has gone among the cattle. If not, the wounds are still sore, but if he has been with the cattle it means that the wounds are well healed although the boy will not say so for fear someone with the evil eye should hear of it."[1]

881 262 During their convalescence the boys are given food in liberal quantities and are probably better fed than at any other time in their lives. Considering that the Nuer is always hungry and frequently starving this abundance of food makes an impression that it is hard for us to appreciate fully. When speaking of their experiences at this period one finds that the festal nature of their convalescence is frequently stressed. They say that if any youth who has not been freshly initiated looks longingly at their food the initiates will belabour him while if it were an older man they would not strike him but neither would they invite him to partake of the meal. The boys share and share alike, no bolts conceded, to any food

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

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that is brought to them. One mother will cook for them in the morning and another in the afternoon and they will take it in turns to provide their sons with food, but what each brings is shared by all and not eaten by her son alone. The mothers themselves bring the food to the hut in which the boys are confined unless they have *thar*, are ritually unclean. If one mother has much milk from the cows of her homestead she will bring it to the boys, while if another cannot procure milk she will make up for her poverty in this respect by supplying plenty of corn for their meals. During the period of their seclusion the boys are restricted to soft food that can be easily swallowed, such as milk and flour paste, but a soft corn mush and even soft and finely chopped meat (*weig ma kuoka*) is allowed them in Lou and Jokany countries. These eatables do not require mastication, a muscular exercise that might cause the veins to break again. Father Crazzolara writes of the West Bank Nuer that the boys are confined for two months and that for the first fortnight no food other than milk and milk mixed with flour is allowed to them.[1] I do not think that this is the case among the Lou and Jokany tribes where the boys eat porridge and soft meat at the commencement of their seclusion and where the period of confinement to their hut does not last for more than a week to a fortnight. During this time they may not wash their faces. After about a week they are allowed to sit up but must remain quietly in a single sitting position. After a few more days they are considered to be healed even though their wounds have not yet closed. Not all the boys heal at the same time: some are healed at the end of a fortnight while others only after a couple of months. When they are allowed to come out of their hut they sit by the door in the evenings and anoint their foreheads with oil and sleep with them oiled. They wake before dawn and wash their foreheads with warm water and then one of the men who is looking after them cleans out clotted blood from the cuts. They then sit and shiver in front of their hut while the cold north wind blows into the wounds and causes them to scarcen.

Apparently it is between the time when they are well enough to leave the hut and the day on which they are ritually cleansed by bathing in a river that they are considered to enter into a period of mildly prescribed license. They still avoid contact with the cattle and spend their time wandering about in bands in neighbouring gardens and bush. In Lou country at this time they wear a special cord, called *kwath*, around their

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 50. "Mit der Milch wird allmählich etwas Mehl vermischt und so etwas dickgekocht. Erst gekochte, dann fest und Milch sind für die ganz Frischen durch mehrere Tage. Etwas Fleischbrühe und allmählich gutes fett gekochtes Fleisch (etwa später dann) bekommen."

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881 786 necks but this is not the custom in Lou country. On both sides of the Nile, however, they carry a special stick, called *rir*. In Lou country the boys wear a special necklace of *kaac* beads. During this period the boys are allowed to behave in a manner that would not be tolerated at ordinary times. If they meet uninitiated boys in the gardens they set upon them and flog them with their neck cords or sticks and tear their flesh with thorns. An uninitiated boy, Tot, showed me scars on his body which had resulted from this treatment. They also beat girls whom they meet but generally they give them the choice of being beaten or submitting to sexual intercourse (*makwi ngath kic makwi dwac*). A party of boys will meet a single girl or several girls together and compel them to submit to intercourse. I was told also that if they meet a dog they may kill it. They are not answerable for any of these irregularities for they are now in a special state in which they are known as *ciŋwi* and it is the privilege of *ciŋwi* to act in these ways. Nevertheless they do not molest initiated men but only boys who do not bear the marks of manhood, and girls.

881 One morning, early, an old woman goes into their hut (*dwil ciŋwi*) and beats the boys out of it with a bunch of green grass. Occasionally this takes place in the evening. They run out of the hut into the gardens where a crowd of people, consisting mainly of women, pelt them with cattle dung (*buk ke wɔr*). They run down to a neighbouring stream to wash themselves and on their return to the homestead may beat the cattle with wild rice (*koor*). They then go and rub themselves in their beloved ashes and sprawl in contentment around the dung fires. They spend the rest of the day leaping behind the bullocks given them by their fathers and maternal uncles.

I am not certain that I have recorded these events in their correct order and it is possible that the cleansing ceremony takes place earlier than I believe. There is also later a concluding ceremony at which a big dance takes place (*ke ruath ɣwot*) and there is general merriment and much duelling. The people who take part in these festivities are members of the age-sets of the fathers of the boys, and their wives, for the boys themselves tour the neighbourhood to ask for presents of giraffe hair and beads and other ornaments from their relatives. At the conclusion of this ceremony a boy's maternal uncle may demand from his father a cow (*yang gɛɛl*, the cow of initiation) on the grounds that his sister's son has now reached manhood. Before the cutting takes place a maternal uncle rubs his sister's son with ashes (*buk*) and makes an address over him (*koor*) so that he will pass through the ordeal without difficulty.

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According to Jackson, after the wounds have completely healed the boys go into camp. He says that a group of about a hundred boys is formed and that a bull is provided for each of them. They settle in a spot about an hour's distance from the village and gorge themselves with meat. A young boy or an old woman cooks for them but they may not be visited by girls. During this time they indulge in feats of endurance and when they have eaten all the bullocks they return to their villages.[1] This account by Jackson is not entirely in accord with my own information which does not lead me to consider these camps as part of the institution of age-sets (*vic*) but as only incidentally associated with it. According to my information the newly initiated boys do not always collect in camps after their wounds have healed but only in some years, about every second year, and then it is not only the new initiates who form a camp but also members of their age-set who have been initiated in previous years and even members of senior age-sets. I was told that even a married man would attend and that a man would attend until his son was old enough to replace him. I think that these camps (called *adit* or *kowar*) are a custom separate from the age-set system, though related to it by the fact that its members are mostly recruited from the unmarried youths of the village and are hence mainly of the same age-set. These camps are also held, moreover, during the closed periods when "the knife is hung up" and no further initiation is allowed to take place. They are held when the first harvest, the *kwal wec*, is ripe. Any youth who possesses a bullock, other than his favourite beast (*dil thakde*), will take it to the *kal*, as these camps are also called, in general with all camps which are without cows and the ordinary activities of pastoral life. A youth will ask his father to give him a bullock so that he may join his comrades at their feasts, and if his father has no beast to spare and his son is insistent in his request he will arrange for him to share a bullock with a friend and will later pay the owner a male calf for the half which is lent to his son. The young men spend a month, or even two months, in the camp, living mainly on meat, for a bullock is killed every three days or so. Nevertheless they also eat a quantity of porridge, since women in the neighbourhood of the camp, which is generally five to ten miles from the homes of the youths, will make porridge and will bring it to the camp to exchange for meat. The skin of slaughtered bullocks and some parts of the meat are taken back to the village for the older men. Apart from eating meat and indulging in the pursuits incidental to this season of the year, especially

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 146-143.

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883 hunting, the camp does not seem to have any expressed purpose or activity. Certainly I never heard that there was any organised educational training. The young men return to their homesteads in time to eat the *mak*, a mash made by beating out the ear and grinding corn not yet fully ripe and still soft.

881 561 What I have recorded above is all I know about the ceremonies of cutting the tribal marks and the periods of seclusion and license associated with the *gar*. So far nothing has been said about the organisation of the *ric*, the age-sets, and I will now turn to this point. According to Jackson "the initiation ceremony should in theory be held about once every 15 years, and this may have been the rule when the tribe was less numerous than it is at the present moment. Nowadays the boys are initiated when there are sufficient of them to make it worth while."[1] It seems to me that this estimate of 15 years is too large since it would mean that many youths would be from 20 to 25 years old at their initiation, which would be contrary to the purpose of the rite. I was told by a good authority in Lou country (Tutrial) that there is always a four years' interval between the closing of one age-set and the commencement of the next one. This information accords with Father Crazzolara's statement that "as a rule the *Gar* takes place once every four years" but he adds that the cattle chief may deviate from this rule for public or even private reasons[2]. He reckons that we may allow about seven years for each *ric* when reckoning a man's age: thus members of the *Pilual* age-set are from 15 to 22 years of age, members of the *Rual* age-set from 22 to 29, members of the *Tambuow* age-set from 29 to 36, and so on. If we can say with fair certainty that there is a four years' interval between each period of initiation we must therefore conclude on this reckoning that each period of initiation lasts about three years. But I am not convinced that we can make so sure a deduction, nor that there is complete regularity in the periods of time during which initiation takes place. Father Crazzolara himself says that the period of initiation may last only a year or up to four years according to the district.[3] On the other hand, at any rate in Lou country, this period may last for several years and youths have been initiated into the *Jokgac* age-set continuously for at least eight years. Judging from this

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 149.

[2] "Les différentes tribus font leur *Gar* tous les quatre ans." Der Londoner-stämme kann man beispielsweise Gründe hierin einer Änderung erblicken können. Sie werden somit a vier ersten Londoner-stämme bei der Einführung der Gerontt entsprechen, so mögen jeder bei dem Entscheidung, ob sein Sohn diesmal gegart werden soll oder ihn nächsten Mal, ebenso mit erwägen, denn das nächste *Gar* erst abschließen wurde, wenn sein (des Sprechers) noch sehr jungen Sohn auch gegart werden könnte, wenn man auch 5 oder 6 Jahren." *Op. cit.*, pp. 18 n.

[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 19. "Die Gerontschaft kann ein Jahr oder auch bis vier Jahren, je nach dem Distrikt, dauer [illegible]."

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fact and reckoning from the appearance of age which members of the various age-sets present, I think that it would be wiser to allow a ten years' interval between each age-set and at the same time remember that this is likely to be fictitious, since the periods during which boys are being initiated are not regular, though the time interval between the cessation of one period of initiation and the commencement of the next are probably the same. Thus I should reckon that the youngest age-set, the *Lilkpar*, in Lou country commenced about 1923 and that the oldest age-set, members of which are still alive (the *Thol*), commenced about 1873. This would make these few survivors about 70–75 years of age to-day. Miss Huffman gives a lower estimate which makes these members of the *Thol* age-set between 60 and 70 years of age, an estimate nearer to that of Father Crazzolara than to mine.[1] However, any calculation must be only roughly approximate since it is not possible to count in the exact manner which the regular cycles of other peoples allow. I am not certain that among the Jokany tribes there are any breaks in initiation, and I am under the impression that initiation goes on every year and that the sets are divided by a declaration of the *wut ak* that all the youths initiated up to a certain time belong to the one set, and all initiated after the time to another set. Thus I was told that in Gaajak country the *Kilkpar* were cut off from the *Rialnan*, but that since the *wut ak* had not come in person to cut them into two sets, in Gaajak country they still remained members of the same set.

The following are the complete lists of age-sets given by various authorities (the oldest age-sets are given first) :—

Jokany (Jurkoon) (?)	Jokany (Huffman)	Gaajok (Jurkoon)
Thl	*Thlok*	*Rugh*
Bul Lolok	*Lajok*	*Jiok*
Bandor	*Cuakuor*	*Chol Bor*
Wang Dak	*Nyagdeng*	*Car Lolok*
Kuith	*Thol* (60–70)	*Tomolok*
Wiaanol	*Rialkar* (50–60)	*Yil Bok*
Karam	*Mabor* (40–)	*Ngun Diny*
Dhuak Nyalkar	*Dongandau* (30–)	*Chuol Chuor*
Pil Nuath	*Carlok* (20–30)	*Lajok*
	Lilkpar Nakki (10–20)	*Thl*
	Lilkpar Nuer (00–10)	*Bul Lolok*
	Car Tabet (1910)	*Mabor*
	Lieeet (1920)	*Dang Gango*
		Chor Bor
		Lil Gatok (1923)

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 33.

[2] I understand from Miss Huffman that this list is incomplete and that the Lou have the same age-sets.

[3] Said to be only one man still living of the time when Jackson wrote.

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Jikany (S-P)	Lou (S-P)	Gaawar, Lak, Twaar (Jackson)
[illegible]	Cuar	B [illegible]
Tiliik	Cuar	Tuongpiny
Cuaar	Tiliik	Gial Bar
Tiar	Tiar	Gaaiik
Cuar	Lilgoany	Gal Lueik
Lueik [illegible]	Nyaakiar	Tiliar Tiliaaiik
Tiel	Tiliik	Kuar Nyang
Riiar	Tiliik [illegible]	Bal Lueik
Riiar	Tiel	Riiaar
Thiangiar	Riiar	Lueik
Cuaar	Riiar	Lac
Lilgoa	Thiangiar	Dang Cuay
Riiaar	Lac	Tiliaaiik (Lueik)
	Lilgoa	Lal Gaiik
		Kuaar (var.)

Bira (Jackson)	Kiethel (S-P)	Jagei (S-P) (incomplete)
Riar	Thiagi	Wia
Tiaik	Lilgoany	Tiel
Cuaaik	Riak	Riiaar
Riar nyang	Wiaakel	Riak
Riiaaiik	Riel	Wiaakel
Lal Riel	Tiliel	Lac
Riar		Kuaar
Riar kal		Tiliel
Thiagi		
Lal Rang		
Lal Tiliaar		
Lal Nyang		
Riak		
Wiang Riel		
Nyang		
Cuar (var.)		

Each age-set has two or three sub-divisions. Each year in the initiation period may receive a separate name though probably two years often have the same name. But though a set is thus stratified internally by a different nomenclature for each year or for every two years, all members of the set have a common name which is the name of the first division of the set to be initiated. This common name persists while the subsidiary names fall eventually into disuse. The set are a unity in relation to other sets while the conventional divisions between different years in the set

* See reference to Riiaar and Lilgoa on p. 247.
* An alternative list going upwards from Tiar into senior age-sets runs: Lueik, Thiagi, Cuaaar, Nyaakiar, Tiar, Cuiar, Tiaang, Lilgoa, Jaaj, Kiethaang, Riiaa.
* This set and all above it are dead.

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itself tend to disappear as the years go on. Thus in Lou country to-day one hears of *Lieth indit* and *Lieth inter* and *Pilual* (*Caiyat*) and *Rialnaar* (*Rial dang*) as four sections of the present initiation period, but all of them are *Lidiger* and the three subsidiary names will fall into disuse and all will one day be called simply *Lidiger*. In the same way one does not hear to-day of *Maker indit* and *Ngundi* but only of *Maker* under which name both divisions are included. In the same manner one hears little to-day of *Gaang indit*, *Carbar*, and *Nyaanyaan* but only of *Dangaaga* or *Gaang* which covers all these sub-divisions. The senior division is called *indit*, the greater, and when the subsidiary names are dropped the *indit* is dropped also since its purpose is to distinguish the upper divisions from the other ones. Hence we have *Thot indit* and *Maker indit* and *Bwiloc indit*, the elder *Thot*, the elder *Maker*, and the elder *Bwiloc*, but the *indit* ending in these names is eventually dropped and the complete sets become known as *Thot*, *Maker*, and *Bwiloc*.

The following are the subdivisions in the age-sets in Lou country as far as I was able to ascertain them :—

Thot	*Thot indit* *Wuothjaang* *Akem* *Bwiloc indit*
Bwiloc	*Gelyangkithoal* *Lidiger*
Maker	*Maker indit* *Ngundi*
Gaang	*Gaang indit* *Carbar* *Nyaanyaan*
Lou	*Lou indit* *Kerem* *Cuanhaart* *Lieth indit (elder)* *Lieth inter* *Caiyat (Pilual)*
Lidiger	*Rialnaar (Rialdang)*

Sometimes a section or sub-section has two different names, *e.g.*, *Gaang* and *Dangaaga*, *Lieth indit* and *Lieth inter*, *Caiyat* and *Pilual*, but I do not think that this has any significance, being due simply to the transition of different names in different parts of the country as far as the great sub-divisions are concerned and being a variation when it occurs in the permanent name of the age-set.

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I believe that these sub-divisions occur all over Nuerland and that they become merged into the single name of the whole set as in Lou country. This fact probably accounts for a number of differences in the lists given above since I think that sometimes sub-divisions have been given as though they were different age-sets whereas in reality they are only two divisions of the same age-set. These divisions occur on the west bank of the Nile no less than on the east bank, and I record beneath a list which I collected from a Lek youth, and though it is almost certainly inaccurate in some particulars it gives clearly enough the method of sub-division :—

Thenyi	
	Lilnyoang
Lilnyoang	*Lilrin*
	Ruak
Ruak	*Lilruath*
	Wandoang
Wandoang	*Tanghiar*
Rol	*Pilual*
	Jiang
Pilual	*Jiauth*
	Gundhin

An informant in Lou country (West) told me that the reason for having different divisions in the same age-set is to prevent a boy and his brother from having an identical status in the age-set. It sometimes happens that two brothers are initiated on the same day but in this case they are distinguished by the younger brother receiving seven cuts across his forehead while the elder brother receives the usual six. Much more frequently it happens that a boy and his brother are initiated into the same age-set though during different years, perhaps two or three years apart from one another. In this case they are distinguished by belonging to different sub-divisions of the age-set.

The names of the age-sets seem quite fortuitous. They are not stereotyped and recurrent as is often the case in East Africa where the age-sets are organised into an age-cycle. Among the Nuer each age-set requires a name by association with some incident of the period of initiation which may have a specific connection with the members of the set or may be of a general nature. Jackson gives a number of interpretations of these names in his papers on the Nuer, *e.g.*, *Rier* (Bul country) were called after the heads of dura (*rier*) because the seed dura

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which was hung up in the huts in preparation for the rains was eaten prematurely; *Qui* (*Kwi*) (Bul country) were called after a *thak ma kwe*, a fish-eagle bullock, black with a white face, which was sacrificed by the cattle-expert before the initiation period was opened. Father Crazzolara derives the name *Pilual*, red water, from the fact that red-coloured beer was served up in the age-set. He says that this *ric* is also called *Codeyalle* (Lak country) because an ox of this name was slaughtered, and also *Lath Warabwi* because of the recent introduction of cotton (*lath*) into the country by the late Capt. Ferguson, whom the Nuer called *Warabwi*. He says that *Lath Gac* are so-called because a couple of recently initiated boys broke into a hut and stole butter (*lath*) from it. They are also called *Bwol* because at the conclusion of the festivities to celebrate their initiation an ox of this name was slaughtered. *Tankcor* are so-called because an ox *ma kwei* was slaughtered.

To these derivations I may add those given to me for the names of the Low age-sets: *Lith tekar* was so-called because the bullock that was sacrificed at the commencement of this *ric* by Gai Jaang, the Gaajak cattle-expert, was of this colour; *Luac* was so-called because it was a period of great hunger and the boys and newly initiated men were forced to satisfy their hunger with gum from acacias (*luac*); *Dangcngo* (an individual member of this set being called *gwong*) was so-called because the boys in hunger were forced to fall back on guinea fowl (*gwong*), which they caught in nooses or struck with clubs thrown at them in the branches of trees to which dogs had driven them; *Makar* was so called because a bullock of this colour was sacrificed, or according to another version it was a Nuer effort to pronounce the arabic word *askari*, as these soldiers were then prominent and used to go about with the government chiefs (the full name according to this second version is *Maskari*); *Bonlar* was so-called because this was a year of cattle plague, and of those which died only the beasts which had a white heart (*bol*, *lac*) were eaten, the others being considered unfit for consumption; I do not know why the *Thot* age-set is so-called. I believe that the name of the set, which is always taken from the name given to the initiates of the first year, is given by the cattle-expert, but the names of the sub-divisions of other years are not given formally by anyone but are a chance popular creation.

There are different ways of referring to the *ric*. Generally one speaks of its members and one then uses the plural of the words given

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561 in the lists above. Thus one speaks of the *Pilual*, the *Karamai*, the *Rudai*, the *Lithgawi*, the *Thaini*, the *Rialmarni*, the *Makei*, the *Nyamnyamni*, etc.

XI.

881 867 In seeking to understand the social action of the Nuer age-set system I think that we should first of all abandon the idea that there is any purposive education in initiation. Neither in connection with the cutting nor during any subsequent stage does the initiation of the boys include educational or moral training. It is true that a father may admonish his son at this time to be brave in war, to avoid the wives of other men, to be generous, and never to display greed, but such advice is of the general kind which may be given unsystematically at any time during boyhood. I could find no evidence that there is any kind of teaching of the boys during initiation, either of technique or of traditions. Nor was I told upon repeated enquiry that there was any moral instruction.

561 114 I cannot agree with Stigand's description of the Nuer age-sets in this respect and I think that he was largely reading into them the purpose and methods of the Masai system with which he was familiar. He wrote of initiated youths: "When finished they are trained by the old class; the training includes mock battles, fighting with sticks and pelting one another with balls of dried clay—to learn quickness in avoiding spear thrusts. After two years the training is complete, the old class then retire and gradually get married whilst the new class having finished their training go back to live in their villages." He says: "The newly-made warrior may not marry until relieved by the next class."[1] I found nothing which could confirm this account of two-years' training and the prohibition of marriage on the older class during the training of the set which was to replace it, and there is nothing in Jackson's account and little in the recent paper by Father Crazzolara which bears it out.

561 701 I think, moreover, that the Nuer age-sets are only incidentally a military system at all, though Stigand and, less dogmatically, Jackson give them this character. It is perfectly true that in warfare the junior age-sets play the chief part, but this is simply due to the fact that they are old enough, and yet not too old, to fight. Boys do not take part in

[1] Op. cit. p. 103.

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warfare because they would certainly be killed if they did and the same applies to old men. Nevertheless a good number of the older men who are more active than fellow-members of their age-set will accompany expeditions. Moreover, war is organized by tribal sections based on locality and communal sentiment and not by the age-set system. The whole of a district or a tribe is summoned to take part in a feud or in a raid on the Dinka, and anyone will accompany the expedition who wishes to do so. They do not call up certain age-sets and leave others at home. During the actual fighting, while it is natural that people of roughly the same age will fight side by side, there is nothing compulsive about this arrangement and men of all ages fight together as a section. Thus when two sections unite for warfare we shall find the men of each section fighting with their section and not with their age-set. In the same way a man is not expected to fight only warriors of his own age-set but will engage with whomsoever he finds opposite to him. Hence we may say that the Nuer age-sets are not regimental, and indeed have no specific military functions, but that since age and the ability to bear arms are necessarily related it happens that active warriors are recruited from certain age-sets. On the other hand the social and economic relations of the age-set system are outstanding and it is in these rather than in its ritual that we must look for its significance.

In its economic relations Nuer social life comprises three groups of persons—the women, the men, and the boys. The productive labour of women differs in many respects from that of men but the most prominent distinction between their activities is in milking the cattle. A man may not milk the cows. This is not simply a customary division of labour, as in cooking for example, but is a ritual prohibition or taboo. Were a man to milk a cow all sorts of misfortunes would follow, in particular the death of the cow. The restriction of milking to women has far-reaching effects on their position in Nuer society. But in this respect boys are classed with the women, for they are allowed to milk the cows until they have been initiated into manhood. Consequently initiation means that a boy ceases to milk; he severs his association with women's work; he becomes a man in the sense that he joins the men's group as distinct from the women's group in social life.

If cessation from milking is the most outstanding change in a boy's occupations after initiation it is by no means the only one, for his whole

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858 561 mode of life changes when he becomes a man, that is to say when he is made a man by social machinery, for he does not become a man in virtue of biological condition alone. An initiated boy ceases also to assist women and girls in the more menial tasks of cattle culture. It is no longer his duty to clear dung from the byres nor to smear it on the floor of the kraals* and dry it for fuel. Neither taboo nor shame attaches to these tasks, it is true, and if there are no women or boys to perform them a man will do them himself, but it is considered to be work for boys and girls. No more will an initiated boy have to milk the goats and sheep and take them out to pasture with the calves. Instead he will sometimes guard the main herd of cattle in their dry season pastures or more generally sit and gossip around the embers of a smouldering dung fire and wait for the womenfolk to bring him the morning meal.

A boy is everybody's servant. Not only must he milk the cattle and sheep and goats and keep clean byre and kraal but he is frequently ordered about by initiated men, sent to draw water, fetch fuel, light pipes, made to go messages, to lead the bullocks round the camp when his elders wish to keep (rest) behind them, and to perform any other task which they require. Certainly boyhood is the period in a man's life when he is most occupied, does most work, than at any other period of his life. One gets the impression when living in a Nuer cattle camp that among the males all the routine work of the camp is done by the boys. After initiation 884 a boy may look forward to a long life of ease. His are now the delights 561 of sitting round a smouldering dung fire with his beloved cattle tethered in front of him. Here he can smoke, sleep, drink milk, gossip, and watch 461 others do the daily monotonous routine work of homestead, dairy, and kraal. There is no one now to disturb his peace by ordering him about. At last he is completely his own master and may work or not as he thinks fit. Every initiated Nuer is his own lord, paying respect to age and the obligations of kinship, but free and independent, owing no man service. A newly initiated boy may now order his juniors about, see that they do their work thoroughly, and admonish and beat them if they are remiss 884 in any task. Even though he is quite small, and perhaps no older than 561 many who are uninitiated, he is a *wut*, a man, while they are *dhiil*, boys.

* "Byre" refers to the large bare in which cattle are housed in the wet season and which is used also as a men's club. "Kraal" is used to denote the space in front of the byre, sometimes enclosed, where the cattle are tethered and also the space where they are tethered, surrounded by a wind-screen. = dry-season camps

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He will respect his elders but they will treat him as a man and with the consideration due to an equal rather than to an inferior.[1] 884

He has now the supreme joy, to which every Nuer boy looks forward with longing, of entering into the full life of the cattle. He will wander with them over their dry season pastures and will have his own bullock, perhaps more than one, to meet when it returns to camp in the evening, strutting along and waving the long tassel attached to its horns as it tosses its head. He will rub its back with ashes in the evening and perhaps invoke the spirit of his lineage or his dead ancestors as he does so. He may now order a boy to lead his bullock round the camp at morning or evening so that he can leap behind it in the sight of the girls, and may walk among the cattle at night ringing a cattle bell and singing about his cattle, his relatives, and his lovers, activities which would be mere presumption in a boy, who would not indeed attempt them. 561

The elation, the feeling of happy superiority, which accompany this change in a boy's life are evident in his behaviour, and their opposites are strikingly shown in the cases of boys who for some reason have not been initiated at the same time as their contemporaries and playmates. The position of such a boy is pathetic. His friends have been promoted and he is left behind. They are men and he is still a boy. Once his equals they have become his superiors. I knew well one boy in this humiliating position and it was painful to observe how acutely he felt it on occasions. He evidently felt shame at the performance of his boys' duties and tried to associate as much as possible with his initiated companions, with whom he had everything in common, rather than with the smaller boys with whom he was socially identified. I think that his friends tried to spare him humiliation as far as they could by treating him as one of themselves though his work and play were of necessity different from theirs. On one occasion a man of about 25 years of age was beating the boys for neglecting their work and idling around my tent, but when he came to this boy of the same age as himself he raised his hand to strike him and said: "And you! what are you doing here?" but he smiled and did not strike him.

After initiation also a boy may give himself over to the absorbing interests of love-making. He may now dance and flirt (*lum*) and indulge 836 883

[1] We speak not exaggerate this equality. Elder men will still call an initiated person who is young enough to be their *child* (*nyal*, boy, and will order him to fetch them things they require. There is no feature of social life which is more characteristic of Nuer than the difference between treating a person as an elder man who speaks to you as his son and being ordered about like a servant by a superior.

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836 883 in sexual relations with girls. Before initiation boys may go to dances but they merely watch and do not take part in them. After initiation they go with the other youths of the village and form part of the dancing group of their lineage (*dep*). When the dancing is over they seize the hands of the girls and sit and flirt with them. A boy will now commence permanent love affairs with girls, and a girl will be recognised by his friends as his love (*kundit*). No uninitiated boy would stand a chance of having a relationship of this kind with a girl, however large he might be, as she would merely laugh at him and call him a boy and tell him to go and become initiated. It is true that boys before initiation will have congress with small girls, but this is not socially recognised, and if his elders hear of it they will tell him not to be a fool as he is only a boy, but after initiation it is not only none of their business what he does, but also he is expected, nay, compelled, by custom to embark upon courtship.

411 884 421 An initiated boy is now invested with two external signs of manhood besides the scars on his forehead. He is given a spear by his father and also a bullock, which he had generally been promised before the operation. If he is lucky he will also get a bullock from a maternal or paternal uncle. A boy will seldom possess a spear of his own and if he carries one he will almost certainly be found to have borrowed it from a relative though he may become the owner of a fishing spear. The possession of a spear is a sign of manhood and it is an object of great pride. One is surprised at the real feeling a Nuer expresses for his spear, almost as though it were animate and not a mere weapon. He is never tired of sharpening and polishing it. It is always in his hand, not only when fighting, hunting and travelling, but also when dancing, leaping behind his bullocks, playing with his comrades, and even when he lays it down it is never far from his side. As the Nuer possess no knives a man's spear does service not only on those occasions when Africans generally make use of it, but on those occasions when other peoples use a knife, for culinary purposes, cutting leather in tether making, cutting an's hide for a bed-rug, and other purposes.

233 554 553 421 A boy is even prouder when he becomes the owner of a bullock and is invested with a bullock name. Even a small boy will speak of his father's bullocks as "our bullocks," and will often regard one of them, the calf of the cow he habitually milks, as his own special one. But it is only his in the general psychological sense of family communism. It

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is not exclusively his and he cannot use it in the way in which bullocks are used for display. Also a boy will often take a bullock name from one of the animals in his father's herd to which he has taken a fancy, again generally the calf of the cow he milks every day, but this is only in imitation of his elders when playing with other boys in make believe of adult life. He has no right to the name and no man would address him by it nor would he mention it in the presence of his elders. But after initiation he has a bullock and a bullock name in his own full social right.

I have already mentioned how he will play with this bullock, and look after it, and sing about it. Undoubtedly a man feels much attachment to the animal and is very much upset at its death. I do not, however, consider this attachment to be like the sentimental attachment which Europeans often feel for a favourite dog or horse. Their feeling springs mainly, I believe, from the association of social prestige which the bullock brings to its owner. It is a shame if one has no bullock to display when one's comrades are having theirs led in procession round the camp. The more bullocks one can put into these processions the greater the prestige of one's name, for a man with several bullocks is obviously a man of wealth and standing, while a man who has not even a single one is of the poorest of the poor. Even if we also take into account the ritual use of bullocks as a sacrificial medium between men and spirits and ghosts, I still think that there has been a tendency to exaggerate the emotional feeling of Nilotes towards particular animals. If a bullock dies its owner will acquire a new one and will take a new bullock name if he cares to do so. He may at any time change his bullock name if a new animal takes his fancy, though people generally seem to keep to the name they took after initiation. During his lifetime a man possesses a great number of bullocks and when he is married he will part with some of them, while others will be handed over to assist relatives to marry or to pay blood-compensation and yet others will be killed on ceremonial occasions. Nuer are never tired of speaking of these bullocks and enumerating their points. Much more could be said on the subject, but as it is only incidental to the institution of age-sets it cannot be discussed here in its completeness.

A man acquires a bullock name at initiation from the animal given to him by his father. He will be addressed by this name by his age-mates—it is particularly their privilege to do so—but also the members

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232 553 of the age-sets directly senior and junior to his set may also call him by his bullock name. Members of his family and kin will address him by his birth name or by a relationship term. The use of a bullock name has egalitarian implications so that it would not be used between persons whose age-sets are distant from one another. A younger man would not address one much older than himself by his bullock name but as "*gwa*," "father," or by the complimentary title of "*son of so-and-so*," mentioning the name of his father, or "*father of so-and-so*," mentioning the name of his eldest child whether son or daughter. Also an old man would not address a much younger one by his bullock name, but as "*gatda*," "*my son*."

561 554 The change of social behaviour which takes place in the life of a Nuer when he passes from the grade of boyhood to the grade of manhood, from *dhol* to *wut*, is shown in the customs I have just described, milking, household tasks of byre and kraal, love-making, dancing, ownership of spear and bullock and bullock-names, etc. But these are customs which differentiate one grade from another grade and not one set from another set. All the age-sets are equivalent in their enjoyment of these privileges and present an undifferentiated opposition to the boys who are deprived of them. There are no further grades into which a set as a whole advances. The Nuer age-sets do not pass out of the grade of warriors into the grade of elders as these grades are not clearly defined among the Nuer. A man, as explained above, ceases to fight when he considers himself too old for this sport and not because his set passes out of a warrior-grade. He marries when he is old enough to do so and when there are sufficient cattle to provide him with a bride, and not because his set passes into a grade of married elders. Instead of the three grades of the Masai system, Boy-grade, Warrior-grade, Elder-grade, there are properly only two Nuer grades, Boy-grade and Man-grade.

But though not graded the sets are stratified and have a traditional pattern of behaviour between one another so that membership of one set evokes a different pattern of behaviour from members of all the other sets. Thus, from the point of view of an individual Nuer, male society falls into three adult groupings: those whom you respect as seniors (associated with your fathers); those with whom you are on terms of intimacy (associated with your brothers); those who owe respect to you (associated with your sons). These patterns of authority, subordinateness and equality, are the only three possible patterns of behaviour between

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individuals in any society, and every society has techniques for determining beforehand which pattern a man employs towards any given member of his community. Nuer culture does this by means of its age-sets as well as through its kinship structure. Any doubt as to how you should act towards a fellow Nuer is eliminated because your attitude towards him is largely determined by your respective memberships of age-sets. Friction and hesitation are avoided because the life of a set evokes from its members a clear pattern of behaviour (*a*) among themselves, (*b*) towards members of senior-sets, (*c*) towards members of junior-sets.

It may be objected that there are more than three age-sets living at the same time, but from the point of view of an individual, the age-sets tend to fall into three groups corresponding with the three generations of father–self–son. Generations are only distinct for the individual. Thus, to-day, in Lou country the following age-sets still have living members: *Thut*, *Bulan*, *Makar*, *Dangnga*, *Lual*, *Lithjar*, and any three of these will generally form a generation in relation to the life history of an individual. To a *Lithjar* son of a *Makar* father all members of the *Makar* age-set are his "fathers" and form a group whose daughters he ought not to marry because their "fathers" are his father's also. To this group he owes respect. The age-sets of *Thut* and *Bulan* fall into the same category as the *Makar* with certain differences due to the greater age of their members. On the other hand a *Lithjar* regards the members of the *Lual* age-set as being on much the same plane as himself in relation to *Dangnga* and *Makar*. The *Lual* and the *Lithjar* will call one another by their bullock-names, and if a *Dangnga* man kills a bullock at a ceremonial feast they will eat together and not with the *Dangnga*. It occurs that if a *Makar* man kills a beast at a feast the *Makar* and the *Bulan* will eat together and the *Dangnga* and *Lual* together; while the *Lithjar* will eat by themselves. Thus, at any one time, owing to the limitations of life, there is a tendency for the age-sets to fall into three divisions in respect to any individual, his seniors, his equals and his juniors. At the beginning of manhood there are only two divisions, equals and seniors, and at the end of manhood there are also only two divisions, equals and juniors, but in middle life there are three divisions.

This social overlapping fits in with biological overlapping, for not all of a man's sons are initiated into the same set. Generally the eldest

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son is initiated into an age-set with one (or sometimes two) intervening age-sets between his age-set and his father's age-set, but two (or sometimes three) age-sets intervene between the age-sets of younger sons and the age-set of their father. This overlapping seems complicated to us but is not so to a Nuer. If we consider the position of a member of the *Maker* age-set we shall see that the *Bediar* are too young to be his "fathers" and he tends to regard them as his equals in contrast to the *Thot*. A man of the *Dangwaga* age-set in the same way regards the *Maker* as his equals because they belong to a younger age-set than that of his "fathers"; but he recognises the authoritarian position of the *Bediar*. Any set tends to regard the set directly senior to it as its equals, though seniors, in contrast to the set higher up who are not only its seniors by a long period of years but also its "fathers." So that while the *Dangwaga* regard themselves as of much the same status as the *Maker* in relation to the *Bediar* the *Maker* regard themselves as of much the same status as the *Bediar* in relation to the *Dangwaga*. Or, while the *Lithgar* consider their position approximately that of the *Laar* when speaking of the *Dangwaga*, the *Laar* group themselves with the *Dangwaga* when speaking of the *Maker*.

The few examples given herewith show actual cases of division between age-sets of fathers and sons. I have stated where the son is the eldest son, but in other cases where I have written younger son I am unable to say for certain his position in the order of sons.

Father.	Age-set.	Son.	Age-set.	Intervening sets.
[illegible]	*Maker*	[illegible] (eldest son)	*Lithgar* (*Ceiyat*)	one
Bol	*Maker*	[illegible] (eldest son)	*Lithgar* (*Dedit*)	two
Gwa	*Dangwaga*	[illegible] (eldest son)	*Lithgar* (*Ceiyat*)	one
Gwandi	*Thot*	[illegible] (eldest son)	*Dangwaga*	two
Jok	*Thot*	[illegible] (eldest son)	*Dangwaga*	two
Kulang	*Dangwaga*	[illegible] (eldest son)	*Pilual*	one
Ngundeng	*Thot*	[illegible] (youngest son)	*Laar*	three
Ngundeng	*Thot*	[illegible] (eldest son)	*Maker*	one
Ocang	*Thot*	[illegible] (eldest son)	*Dangwaga*	two
Ocang	*Thot*	[illegible] (youngest son)	*Laar*	three
Ngot	*Lithgar*	[illegible] (eldest son?)	*Wandwil*	one

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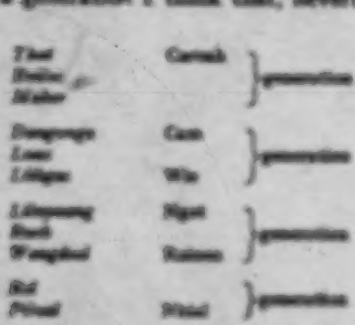
In this list there are only two cases where two generations are recorded, and though two cases are not adequate to show the normal number of age-sets which go to a generation I think that, nevertheless, these two are typical.



It is not easy to describe the patterns of behaviour which operate between age-sets as they are of a very general nature. They are formally expressed in feasts when members of an age-set, or of two consecutive age-sets, eat together and apart from their seniors and juniors, or when members of an age-set purposely abstain from taking part in a feast when one of their members has died. But also in the daily life of village and cattle camp juniors show seniors deference in all situations which occur, in disputes, discussions, economic activities, etiquette, and so on. Father Crazzolara gives an example of this deference when he says "a boy has caught a fish, and an old man, a *nyi*-comrade of his father, desires to have this fish and the boy must give it to him, and when his father, for whom it was intended, hears of this, he is glad that his son has such good manners."[1]

Age-mates are on terms of complete equality. They associate together in all activities of life, in work and war and leisure. A man does not stand on ceremony with an age-mate but eats and plays and jokes with him as an equal. When two men of the same *nic* are quarrelling, so long as their quarrel has not resulted in a serious fight, others ought not to interfere. I have often noticed that when small boys of about the same age are fighting with their spiked bracelets the men will laugh and encourage them, saying that they are of the same *nic*, that is to say, of the same age, but the women folk run to separate the boys and to take the part

[1] Not one Shilluk whom I took with me to Kaguruma knew what Lango meant, so how or from whom we gained this word must remain a mystery, but the Shilluk themselves use, almost daily, word or verb from whom corresponds to Lango *nyi*.

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561 of the lad belonging to their family. Age-mates are those who naturally
857 associate together in any society in the world. Father Crazzolara writes
"A kind of relationship springs up between the *Bio*-comrades, akin to close
comradeship. According to the views of the people they belong to one
another. When they live together or meet by chance, the meals prepared
561 for the one or the other are eaten in common. In travelling *Bio*-comrades
are natural hosts."[1] A man may address a fellow member of his *ric*, his
age-set, as *ninda*, *da* being a suffix meaning "my."

Apart from this general pattern of egalitarian behaviour between members of the same age-set, their like mode of behaviour towards members of other age-sets, their common title, and their exogamous relations, there are a number of customs that ritually express their equality. The chief of these is the strict prohibition on any member of a dead man's age-set of partaking of the flesh of a beast killed at his mortuary ceremony. Anyone who broke this rule would inevitably die of *muar*, the punishment which falls on those who break serious taboos.

Another custom allows a man of your age-set to ask you if anyone has claimed your daughter's eldest cow, and if you reply that no one has claimed it he will take a bracelet from off his arm and place it on the little girl's leg. When she is married he will then be entitled to claim the young *rion*, "the beast of the age-set." It is important to note this custom in its relation to the rule that a man must not marry the daughter of an age-mate since the acceptance of any part of bride-wealth is recognition of an exogamous relationship between the people concerned. Further customs that express the social equivalence of age-mates are the rule which says that when two members of the same age-set have adjoining gardens they shall not erect the usual boundary-line of raised earth between them, and the custom which says that if a youth gets a thorn under his finger nail and has to cut it out all members of his age-set who
[F18] are present ought also to cut off the tip of a toe nail as well. As we have
561 seen an initiation feasts a man is permitted to joke and take liberties with
835 the wife of a man of his own age-set. She is not a possible future mother-in-law, since a man cannot marry a daughter of an age-mate, whereas the

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 48. [illegible] *Bio*-comrades [illegible] Nuer [illegible] *Bio*-comrades [illegible] Evans-Pritchard [illegible]

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wives of men of other age-sets may one day become his mother-in-law. 561
I have never heard it suggested that men have any sexual rights over 835
wives of their age-mates and Nuer were always shocked at my enquiries about this point. I think that they would regard adultery with the wife of an age-mate as worse than ordinary adultery and in the light also of a ritual infringement; but I have no certain evidence about this.

But it is chiefly at feasts that the age-sets are divided up ceremonially 561
as I have explained above. The *kaw* of an animal goes to the *nic maiat*, 574
the junior age-set who may eat themselves or may share the meat with the set directly senior to them, according to the seniority of the set to which the owner of the beast belongs. One informant gave me a general example without specifying the seniority of the owner of the animal. He said that at a feast the *kaw* would go to the *Lithpar* in Lou country, the *kaw* to the *Makwi* and the *jaak* to the *Bonlor*. If a *Dangwonge* killed the animal we would therefore expect the *Laar* to eat with the *Lithpar*, the *Dangwonge* with the *Makwi* and the *Bonlor* by themselves or with any remaining members of the *Thut* set; while if the animal belonged to a *Makwi* we would expect the *Dangwonge* to eat with the *Makwi* and the *Laar* with the *Lithpar*. I may have stated this arrangement too rigidly, and even erroneously, as I rely on one or two casual remarks, and it will be necessary to observe actual feasts before one can say for certain how the age-sets are usually divided at them. One informant (Jok) told me [585]
that sometimes at a marriage feast the father of the bride will kill a "young ox," "a beast of the age-set," for all the members of his age-set, who would make a special point of coming to the wedding. He said that in this case members of other age-sets would not be provided with meat though they might beg some from the age-mates of the bride's father.

One of the actions of the age-set system is the regulation of marriage. 561
In my previous essay I pointed out that the clan is an exogamous group 582
and that any near genealogical relationship through the female line is also a bar to marriage. The *ric*, or age-set, is also the basis of an exogamous group since no man may marry the daughter of an age-set. The reason for this prohibition is found in the convention by which all age-mates are regarded as brothers and, therefore, the children of one are regarded as the children of all, just as the children of a man's brother are his children also. Hence a man speaks of all the children of his age-mates as "my children," and is also barred from marriage with one

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561 582 who counts by fiction, or analogy, as his daughter. I think we are justified also in regarding the actual ceremony of initiation as creating something in the nature of blood-brotherhood between the members of an age-set, since the Nuer seem to regard them as having a kind of community through the blood they have shed together. The Nuer also regard the lineage and clan as a group of people physiologically related as well as sociologically connected, since they have a portion of the common blood of kin.

[835] Not only is a man prohibited from marriage with the daughter of his age-mates, but he will refrain from having love affairs with them or flirting with them. When I asked what would happen if a man were to marry the daughter of an age-mate, I was told that his comrades would appeal to the *kwoth nhialom*, the spirit of their age-set, stating in an invocation that this man has no respect for their set and asking that he might be removed. He would then die. It is difficult to know how we are to interpret *kwoth nhialom*, but it seems that each *nic* is thought to be associated with its special guardian spirit though I do not think that these have special names.

This prohibition on the marriage of daughters with age-mates on the grounds of brotherhood between them is quite conventional and does not mean that age-mates are regarded as equivalent to brothers in either physiological or sociological sense. Perhaps the function of the prohibition is to be sought in the pattern of equitarian behaviour existing between age-mates and their wives, a pattern of behaviour quite incompatible with that existing between a man and his father- and mother-in-law. If a man were to marry a daughter of an age-mate his age-mate would become his father-in-law and his wife would become his mother-in-law and he would have to act towards them with such respect as to make it impossible for him to eat or drink in their homestead. But the Nuer system decrees also that a man may act with the greatest freedom, as we have seen earlier, towards his age-mates and their wives. There would hence be a clash between two completely opposed patterns of behaviour, and this is avoided by the fiction of brotherhood considered as the relationship equal to real brotherhood in respect to marriage with daughters though different in most other respects. Doubtless the prohibition is re-enforced by the fact that there would always be a very great difference in age between a man[1] and the daughter of an age-mate, for

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marriage between people of about the same age is usual in the Nuer society and marriage with a girl of the age of one's children is exceptional. 561 582

Conventionality of the prohibition is shown when we come to consider the relations of a man to the daughters of his father's age-mates, because if there were any real identity between age-set relationships and kinship relationship these women would stand in the position to him of sister (father's brother's daughter). In point of fact, Nuer theory holds that children of age-mates may not marry and they form a secondary exogamous group based on the age-set system.

Diagram No. XXIII.

A	Age Mates ♂
B	Children of A ♂ ♀

Thus members of group A may not marry into group B, A and B together forming an exogamous group comprising two generations. A is not an exogamous group since it contains only males and these are permitted to marry one another's sisters, if they are not prohibited from marriage on other accounts. B on the other hand forms in itself an exogamous group consisting of males and their sisters who are not supposed to intermarry.

However, the prohibition on inter-marriage between children of age-mates (between members of group B) is not seriously enforced, at any rate to-day, though I was told that in the past the rule was upheld. Thus, in Diagram No. XXIV, theoretically C ♂ cannot marry D♀ since A ♂ and B ♂ are age-mates. Because A ♂ and B ♂ are "brothers," B ♂ is the "father" of C ♂ and C ♂ cannot marry D ♀ his "father's daughter." It seems, however, that to-day so long as A ♂ or B ♂ is dead, the marriage is allowed between C ♂ and D ♀ on condition that they make exchange of a special cow or sheep or goat as atonement (*ut*) for breaking the taboo. This animal is probably ear-marked for the *kwath riodiew*, spirit of their age-set, though I was not told that this was the case.[2] An instance of this kind was told in the family of one of my Nuer servants, Tot, whose sister was married to a man whose father was an age-mate of Tot's father. The husband gave Tot, whose father was dead, a female

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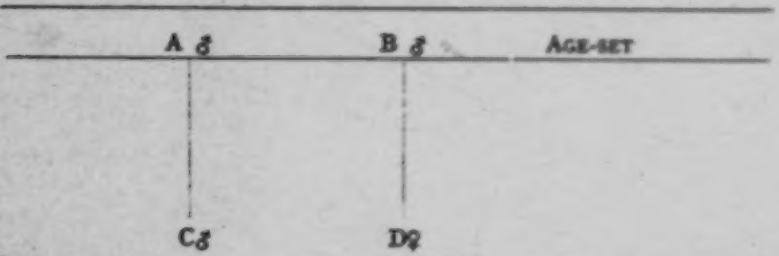
goat, and Tot gave the husband's father a male sheep. It may be doubted, nevertheless, whether such a marriage would have been regarded as correct by the older generation. I was told, however, that a man would not hesitate to flirt with, or make love to, female children of his father's age-mates without intention of marrying them, and it is evident that the restriction has nothing like the same force as that on the marriage between men and the daughters of their age-mates.

DIAGRAM XXIV.



To understand the Nuer age-set system we have to observe how it regulates the behaviour of members of a community towards one another. It acts together with the kinship system in determining everybody's attitude towards everybody else, so that the behaviour of each to each other is known beforehand, since it is evoked by their status in relation to one another. We have already seen how by a fiction which recognises adoption as true kinship and by the value attached to descent through the mother as well as through the father, a Nuer community comprises a network of interrelations of a kinship type which are spoken about in genealogical terms. These, however, leave authoritarian status largely ill-defined, and as is usual in societies where rank is unknown leadership is based on social recognition of biological differences of sex and age. In Nuerland authority is in the hands of the males and older males.

So dominant are notions of kinship among the Nuer that the age-set system is expressed in the ideology of family and kin as we have observed and tends to be spoken of as "fathers," "brother," "sons." Doubtless, this association lends weight to the institution of age-sets and makes them easy for an individual to understand and take part in. Talking to Nuer about their age-sets, one receives a marked impression that the notions associated with them are the familiar notions of family

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life. Certainly the Nuer always speaks of them in terms of family and kin. Not only does he speak of his "fathers" and "sons," but he speaks about members of age-sets senior to his own but not of his father's age-set as though they were his fathers-in-law and their wives his mothers-in-law. These peoples must be respected because their daughters are your lovers and one day may be your wives. Thus a *Lilkgar* son of a *Makw* father will regard members of the *Dangwaga* age-set and their wives as potential mothers- and fathers-in-law.

The analysis presented in this paper may appear difficult, perhaps unconvincing, when stated in abstract terms, but observe how daily contacts and occupations in a Nuer cattle-camp operate smoothly and how their smooth working is partly a result of social stratification by age. We have seen how the question of who shall perform tasks connected with the monotonous task of cattle-raising is settled by the clear cleavage between the duties of men and the duties of boys. In the many situations that arise in the daily life of cattle-camps, one has opportunity to see how the young give way to the old and listen without interrupting to their advice and admonition in disputes and discussions of all kinds. They will order the younger men to perform services for them and will lecture them upon shortcomings; and the extraordinary pride of a Nuer, the object of ceaseless astonishment to Europeans, no matter how long they have resided in the country, is not injured by orders and admonition from a man of a senior age-set. One observes that the frequent quarrels in a Nuer cattle-camp are between members of the same age-set, and for a man to struggle with the members of a junior age-set would be ignoble for both alike. Everybody's behaviour to everybody else is thus defined on rough, general lines in the daily range of their contacts. In your relations with A he must pay deference to you since he belongs to an age-set junior to your own. On the other hand when you meet B you must defer to his opinion and you may do as he asks you to do without losing your dignity. Boys are everybody's servants. You have left your spear in your windscreen when you have been visiting friends and you want someone to bring it to you. You look round and see C, a boy, and you tell him to go and fetch it. Then there is D, who is of the same age-set as yourself. He is your comrade and your equal. He can say anything he likes to you and you can reply to him as you like. Your equality is shown as much in your quarrels as in your fellowship. It is

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561 expressed in your close association, in love-making and dancing, in hunting and warfare, in mutual visiting and sharing of meals. The essence of such a system is that it should work automatically for there is no one to enforce it. You ought to behave with deference or equality or superiority to men of different age-sets, and if you do not behave towards a man as his age-status requires you to do, then you will have done the wrong thing—people will say so openly and your father and uncles will consider themselves insulted by your conduct towards a member of their age-set and you will suffer from their chagrin. That the system works is perhaps in part due to its association with kinship ideology and also to the fact that it does not have to work outside the local community where the bonds of kinship are effective. It stratifies members of the local grouping, of the village and district and cattle-camp.

603 Every society regulates the interaction of its members, among other ways by organising them into age-grades that are associated with the ideology of family life. The problem is: why does age become stratified into formal sets? I do not know that any satisfactory answer can be given to that question and none will be attempted here. It is pertinent to ask, however, whether there are any other means of determining community interrelations in questions of leadership and authority. From this point of view, it would be desirable to make a comparative study of what happens in neighbouring cultures like those of the Shilluk and Dinka, especially among the Shilluk where the system has almost entirely broken down, for we may suppose that it has at one time been less negligible a social influence than at present, and also in those East African societies, like the Masai, where the age-set institution has reached its highest development. But, although such questions can only be treated on the basis of comparative study we may, nevertheless, note once more the absence of any very decided political status among the Nuer. Nor does a kinship system provide an adequate means of denoting 624 leadership. Even in the narrowest type of kinship relations, that between 561 brothers, authority is not an integral part of patterns of kinship behaviour. And we have to remember that wielding of authority is always a difficult 182 matter in any society, and where it is not based on open restraint this is due to a clear cleavage between those who order and those who obey, each person knowing at once to which party the other belongs. Among the Nuer it can hardly be said that leadership and authority are highly

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developed, but in so far as they are present, they derive their sanction to a large extent from the age-set system. We must also remember that age-sets are organised tribally and are one of the institutions common to all members of the same tribe and may, therefore, be supposed to act as a unifying agency in the loose political life which we have seen to characterise Nuer tribes. As much as language, moreover, it is participation in a Nuer age-set that stamps a man as a Nuer and distinguishes him from Dinka, Shilluk, Anuak, and other peoples. When you have six weals running across your forehead you are a real Nuer, a member of the finest nation on earth. The Nuer does not doubt his superiority over the other folk and is intensely proud of the marks on his forehead which prove his nationality.

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